

PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PEA  
RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, IN THE STATE OF  
ARKANSAS

JUNE 13, 1956.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State  
of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. ENGLE, from the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,  
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H. R. 11611]

The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 11611) to provide for the establishment of the Pea Ridge National Military Park, in the State of Arkansas, having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF H. R. 11611

If enacted, H. R. 1611 would provide for the establishment of the Pea Ridge National Military Park, in the State of Arkansas, after all lands to be included within said park have been donated and transferred free and clear of all encumbrances to the United States without expense to the Federal Government.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BATTLE OF PEA RIDGE

The Battle of Pea Ridge, Ark., March 7 and 8, 1862, also known as the Battle of Elkhorn Tavern, has been referred to as the Gettysburg of the West. The Union victory in this battle thwarted a Confederate attempt to take Missouri and ended major hostilities for several years in the area west of the Mississippi.

The importance and historical significance of the Battle of Pea Ridge may best be realized when one considers that had the Confederates gained a decisive victory at Pea Ridge, they probably would have taken Missouri. Much of the State was pro-Southern in sentiment; she was the eighth largest State and was strategically located with respect to Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, and Arkansas; she could control

the Mississippi River; and she bordered Kentucky and Tennessee. Some historians believe that had Missouri gone with the Confederacy the whole story of the Civil War might have been different.

The committee notes that the Battle of Pea Ridge has been of particular significance and interest to the people of Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, western Kentucky, and western Tennessee.

The significance of the Battle of Pea Ridge is well presented in a report prepared by the Legislative Reference Service (J. S. Sweet, History and General Research Division, May 28, 1956), Library of Congress. The report was prepared at the request of this committee and is set forth following:

#### THE BATTLE OF PEA RIDGE

The Battle of Pea Ridge (or Elkhorn Tavern), Ark., March 7 and 8, 1862, like many of the other Civil War operations in the trans-Mississippi region, is often given little attention because the main theater of activity, as the Civil War developed, was to the east. The Union victory at Pea Ridge, in the northwestern tip of Arkansas, however, ended major hostilities for several years in the area west of the Mississippi.

The principal importance of Pea Ridge is that the Union victory there thwarted a Confederate attempt to take Missouri. A critical question for the Union at the outset of the war was whether or not the so-called border States (the slave States of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri—and the area of western Virginia which subsequently became West Virginia) would join the Confederacy. Local public opinion played its role in bringing all of these States into the conflict on the Union side, but military factors were also important.

Particularly important was Missouri. Much of the State was pro-southern in sentiment, but there was a large German population in St. Louis which was strongly pronorthern. "Had Missouri gone with the Confederacy," states Henry S. Commager, "the whole story of the war might have been different. She was the eighth largest State; she controlled the Mississippi; she bordered Illinois and Kentucky; she commanded the road to Kansas and Nebraska" (New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Aug. 21, 1955, p. 6).

During the year 1861, rival Union and Confederate forces had been organized in Missouri. In June 1861, the Union general, Nathaniel Lyon, pursued the Confederates into southwestern Missouri. In August, he decided to attack the Confederates at Wilsons Creek, 10 miles southwest of Springfield, Mo. The Union troops were defeated and retreated toward Rolla. The Battle of Pea Ridge, just across the Arkansas border, in the following year, was decisive in breaking up a Confederate troop concentration there and bringing Missouri under definite (if precarious) Union control.

Meantime, Grant had taken Forts Henry and Donelson, on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers (February 1862)

in Tennessee. Following Pea Ridge (March) came the battle of Shiloh (April), in southwestern Tennessee, and Grant's subsequent attempts to take Vicksburg (1862-63). Most of the available troops, both Union and Confederate, were soon engaged in this struggle. One reason for the decisive character of Pea Ridge was the fact that troops on both sides were withdrawn from the area for the campaigns to the east.

The Battle of Pea Ridge came about because Union troops under Gen. Samuel R. Curtis, commander of the Union Army of the Southwest, had pursued the Confederate forces into southwestern Missouri and across the border into northwestern Arkansas following the battle of Wilson's Creek (Springfield, Mo., August 1861) and defeat of a Union force at Lexington, Mo. (September 1861). The Union forces had penetrated as far as Fayetteville, Ark., when the Union commander became aware that the Confederates were preparing to oppose him and consolidated his position at Pea Ridge, several miles south of the Missouri line in Benton County, Ark.

General Curtis was outnumbered, but the superior generalship and the fine superiority of the Union troops, plus the unreliability of some of the Indian troops on the Confederate side (many of whom proved unmanageable), and the fact that Gens. Benjamin McCulloch and James McIntosh, two of the top-ranking Confederate officers, were killed turned the battle into a Union victory. Curtis had retired to prepared fortifications near Pea Ridge, but during the night of March 6-7, 1862, Van Dorn, the Confederate commander, managed to work his forces around to the rear of Curtis' positions. Curtis, however, learned of this strategem in time to prepare for Van Dorn's attack about 10:30 a. m. on March 7. The first day's fighting, although indecisive, went heavily against the Union troops, which were forced in several places out of their positions. Concentrating his troops in a more compact manner, next day Curtis' forces, particularly those under Siegel, who had helped organize the St. Louis Germans on the Union side, did an excellent job of knocking out most of the Confederate batteries on Pea Ridge, which lay above them to the north. One element in the Union victory was apparently the superior range of the Union rifles. Seeing that the Confederate forces were apparently in confusion, Curtis ordered a charge and dispersed them. The Confederate leaders were unable to regroup their men, who scattered into the woods.

The number of troops engaged at Pea Ridge was probably closer to 30,000, according to Monaghan, the most recent writer on the subject (p. 249), than to 60,000. Probably both the Union and Confederate commanders had more troops at their disposal, but they were not all on the scene at the time of the battle. The number of Indians on the Confederate side under Gen. Albert Pike has been estimated at between 1,000 and 5,000. Some of the troops on the Union side were probably recent German immigrants, but

no reference has been found to hired Hessians. It is possible that some Germans may have come to the United States in hopes of gaining monetary bounties paid for enlistments, and perhaps land grants after the war. (The Homestead Act, opening up much western land for free settlement, was signed in May 1862, but it had previously been passed and vetoed by President Buchanan.)

The Union victory at Pea Ridge might be regarded in one sense as being a "Gettysburg" of the West—for, like Gettysburg, it marked the failure of a southern attempt to invade Union territory. A comparison of the estimated number of troops at Gettysburg and Pea Ridge shows:

Pea Ridge:

Troops:

10,500 Union.

16,000? Confederate.

Casualties:<sup>1</sup>

1,500 Union.

1,500 Confederate.

Gettysburg:

Troops:

82,000 Union.

75,000 Confederate.

Casualties:<sup>1</sup>

23,000 Union.

30,000 Confederates.

The troops involved, of course, were far less at Pea Ridge, and the stakes were different. Had Lee won at Gettysburg, he would probably have taken Philadelphia and come up on Washington from the rear. Had the Confederates won at Pea Ridge, they would probably have taken Missouri. Pea Ridge, while decisive in its area, was not on the grand scale of Gettysburg.

Estimates as to the number of troops at Pea Ridge vary, but according to Jay Monaghan (*Civil War on the Western Border*, 1854-65, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1955, p. 336), there were 26,700 there, as compared to Westport, 29,000 men (October 1864); Prairie Grove, 24,000 (December 1862); Lexington, 21,000 men (September 1861); and Wilson's Creek, 15,575 men (August 1861). These were all battles in the area west of the Mississippi. Westport, at which the third attempt of the Confederates to invade Missouri was defeated, has itself been called "the Gettysburg of the West" (*Dictionary of American History*, vol. 5, p. 449). "In every one of these engagements," says Monaghan, "except Pea Ridge, the army with the greatest number won the victory—a commentary on Curtis' generalship when at his best." The Confederates were badly outnumbered at Westport, on the outskirts of Kansas City, Mo.

Van Dorn, the Confederate commander at Pea Ridge, Monaghan states elsewhere (p. 249), "entered the conflict with an army estimated as numbering from 16,000 to 25,800 men, and on March 11, 1862, he was reported to have only 2,894 answer rollcall—a misleading statement, for many more

<sup>1</sup> Killed, wounded, and missing.



reported later. Van Dorn declared his losses to be 1,000 with an additional 300 made prisoner. Curtis, with 10,500 men before the battle, admitted losing 1,384 in killed, wounded, and missing."

Following are some other comparative figures:<sup>1</sup>

Pea Ridge:	
Troops:	
10,500 Union	
16,000? Confederate	
Casualties:	
1,500 Union	
1,500? Confederate	
Seven Days' Battles:	
Troops:	
105,000 Union	
86,500 Confederate	
Casualties:	
16,000 Union	
20,000 Confederate	
Chancellorsville:	
Troops:	
130,000 Union	
60,000 Confederate	
Casualties:	
17,000 Union	
12,500 Confederate	
Shiloh:	
Troops:	
55,000 Union	
50,000 Confederate	
Casualties:	
10,000 Union	
10,000 Confederate	
Antietam:	
Troops:	
50,000 Union	
40,000 Confederate	
Casualties:	
12,000 Union	
9,000 Confederate	
Chickamauga:	
Troops:	
60,000 Union	
60,000 Confederate	
Casualties:	
16,000 Union	
16,000 Confederate	
Wilderness-Cold Harbor:	
Troops:	
118,000 Union	
60,000 Confederate	
Casualties:	
55,000 Union	
30,000? Confederate	

What effect had Pea Ridge on saving Missouri, southern Illinois, Arkansas, and the Indian territory (Oklahoma) for the Union?

The Battle of Pea Ridge undoubtedly saved Missouri from the threat of Confederate attack. The State was the scene of much guerrilla activity during the subsequent period, but so far as overall control was concerned, it was principally under Federal control.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are all rough approximations.

Had the Confederates been able to take St. Louis, they might have been able to extend their control over the contiguous area in southern Illinois. As Pea Ridge was the point at which the proposed attack on St. Louis was halted, it is possible that success at Pea Ridge might have led to Confederate seizure of St. Louis and an invasion of southern Illinois.

The situation in Arkansas following Pea Ridge became more favorable to the Union, and General Curtis, the Union commander at Pea Ridge, was able to take Batesville, threaten Little Rock, and go on to Helena, on the Mississippi. This might have been considered a direct consequence of Pea Ridge. Most of southwestern Arkansas remained in Confederate hands during the war, however, although the Union troops managed to take Little Rock in September 1863.

The Five Civilized Tribes, being slaveholders, generally supported the Confederacy. Some Oklahoma Indian troops fought at Pea Ridge on the Confederate side. Some of them proved to be unreliable soldiers who had no real desire to aid the South. The Indian Territory itself was split between Confederate and Union sympathizers, and was a constant scene of guerrilla war. Parts were under the control of pro-Union Indians and parts under the control of pro-Southern Indians.

Although fighting went on on a hit-and-run basis in Missouri, Arkansas, and the Indian Territory, Pea Ridge is generally agreed to have been decisive in ending the concerted Confederate attempt to gain predominant control of the area. After Pea Ridge (and Apache Canyon, N. Mex., March 1862), the Confederate forces west of the Mississippi were generally on the defensive, except for guerrilla and raiding activities. The general Confederate strategy throughout the war, was of course, defensive.

As such, it was an important factor in clearing the Mississippi area of effective Confederate opposition. Grant's victories at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, the Union victories at New Madrid and Island No. 10, the Confederate retreat at Shiloh, Memphis, New Orleans, and, above all, the Union invasion of Mississippi and victory at Vicksburg (July 4, 1863), were all essential parts of this operation. Pea Ridge was decisive in ridding the northern part of Arkansas and most of Missouri of hostile Confederate forces.

What was the influence of Pea Ridge on Kentucky and Tennessee?

Viewed as part of the Union's general strategy to clear the Mississippi Valley of Confederate troops, failure at Pea Ridge, and at New Madrid, Mo., and at Island No. 10, in the Mississippi, southeastern Missouri (March and April 1862) would have been a definite setback. Had the Confederacy won at Pea Ridge, it certainly would have followed up its victory by attempting to occupy Missouri up to the Missouri River line or farther, and perhaps to take St. Louis. Assuming success, they would then have been in a position to attack the Union forces in Kentucky and Tennessee. Perhaps the

Union would have had to fight the Confederacy in Missouri once more before proceeding to the invasion of Mississippi. The Union objective of seizing control of the Mississippi would probably have been delayed, to some extent, at least.

The extent of the Confederate threat to Kentucky and Tennessee, supposing it to come from Missouri, would depend, of course, on the number of troops the Confederacy would have been willing to commit in that area. Most of the available Confederate troops, as it developed, were concentrated by Jefferson Davis east of the Mississippi. Davis had to meet the aggressive threat of Grant's troops as well as think about raiding the Union rear. By the time of Pea Ridge, Grant was already approaching northern Mississippi. The Federals were only momentarily halted at Shiloh (April 1862). A Confederate success at Pea Ridge might have enabled the South to rush a few more troops to Shiloh. The available evidence indicates Van Dorn had difficulty reforming his forces after Pea Ridge. Probably some of them never came back, but joined guerrilla bands. However, by the time the Union took Corinth, Miss. (October 1862), Southern troops in the area were far outnumbered.

Had the Confederates won Pea Ridge and gone on to take Missouri, it is possible that they might have been in a position, with the Indian allies, to exert pressure on Kansas Territory to the west. They might have been able to raid or invade Kansas, destroying crops and interfering to some extent with Northern food supplies originating in that area. A certain amount of this raiding did go on during the Civil War, despite the fact that Missouri was in nominally Union hands. Had Missouri been under complete Confederate control, the raids on Kansas would have doubtless been much more effective. Possibly Confederate raids might have been staged on Iowa to the north also, but it would have been easier to raid Kansas.

The fact that the gold and silver mining areas of Nevada and California were in Union hands, of course, was useful to the Union in maintaining the soundness of its currency during the Civil War. Although both Union and Confederate currency depreciated, there is no doubt that Union finances were in a stronger position. At the outset of the Civil War, the Butterfield Stage Route to California, which was a predominantly southern route through Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and New Mexico, was necessarily closed to the Union. The North therefore had to rely on a more northerly route. The route of the Overland Trail, which went through the Platte Valley to Wyoming, with its California cutoff via Nevada, was still open. Had the Confederacy taken all of Missouri following Pea Ridge, they might have been able to seize the eastern terminus of this route. However, it might have been shifted north in that event, or gold and silver shipments might have been sent by sea. The decisive factor was that California and Nevada, where the gold and silver mines were located, were in Union hands.

While it was not a major battle on the scale of Gettysburg, Pea Ridge was decisive in its area. The war was decided elsewhere, but outside of the Red River campaign of 1864, and the Battle of Westport, 1864, few other Civil War operations beyond the Mississippi rank with it in historical interest.

#### EXPLANATION OF THE BILL

H. R. 11611 is a clean bill introduced by Representative Trimble of Arkansas following hearings on H. R. 8558, a similar bill also introduced by Mr. Trimble.

If enacted, H. R. 11611 would authorize and direct the Secretary of the Interior to make an examination of the Pea Ridge Battlefield with a view to determining the area or areas thereof deemed desirable for inclusion in the Pea Ridge National Military Park and which, except for not more than 20 acres, lie within the lands described in the bill. The measure provides that the lands designated by the Secretary shall not become a unit of the national park system until all non-Federal lands, which shall not be less than 1,200 acres, have been acquired by others and transferred in whole, free and clear of all encumbrances, to the United States without expense to the Federal Government. The land is not to be accepted piecemeal.

The measure provides that following the establishment of the Pea Ridge National Military Park the unit shall be developed, administered, and protected under the provisions of the act which established the National Park Service in 1916, as amended. It is also stipulated that in order to provide for the proper development and maintenance of the park, the Secretary of the Interior shall construct and maintain therein such roads, trails, markers, buildings, and other improvements, and such facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors as he may deem necessary.

The measure would authorize the appropriation of such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the act.

The committee does not have an estimate of the cost of developing and maintaining the park since the National Park Service has never undertaken such a study. However, it does not appear that such costs would be substantial for the following reasons:

1. All of the necessary land will be donated to the United States;
2. Elkhorn Tavern, a landmark dating back to the Civil War days and a station on the old Butterfield Stage Route is located near the center of the battlefield and is to be donated for inclusion within the park unit. This building is reported to be in good condition and suitable for use as a museum;
3. Many battlefield and Civil War relics are in the possession of residents of the area who have expressed a desire to donate them for use in the park unit; and
4. A number of roads traverse the area, including U. S. 62; from this it would appear that only minor roads and trails to various points of interest on the battlefield may be needed for access purposes.

#### DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

The report of the Department of the Interior, wherein it is recommended that this legislation be not enacted, is set forth below. The assertion in the Department's report that the Battle of Pea Ridge



was not of sufficient significance appears to have been to a substantial degree refuted elsewhere in the report wherein the following statements appear:

1. The Battle of Pea Ridge was one of the largest engagements of the Civil War fought west of the Mississippi River \* \* \*.
2. Probably as much as any other single factor, the battle determined that the State of Missouri would remain Union rather than become Confederate.
3. After the battle, there was no further fighting of any major character in the State for the next 2 years.

These three facts alone well mark the decisiveness and outstanding importance of the Battle of Pea Ridge, the Gettysburg of the West. One need only to consider what the Confederacy might have done had it been able to gain the manpower, resources, and strategic location of Missouri for use against the Union early in the Civil War. The report of the Library of Congress, set forth earlier in this report, treats with this subject.

One suspects that if the Battle of Pea Ridge had been fought in the well-populated East, the main theater of the Civil War activity, it would have been given much attention and memorialized as a military park long ago.

The reports of the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of the Budget are set forth as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,  
Washington, D. C., April 27, 1956.

Hon. CLAIR ENGLE,  
*Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,  
House of Representatives, Washington 25, D. C.*

MY DEAR MR. ENGLE: Your committee has requested a report on H. R. 8558, a bill to provide for the establishment of the Pea Ridge Battlefield National Park, in the State of Arkansas. This bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to acquire by gift, purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, the Pea Ridge Battlefield property, situated near Bentonville, Ark., for national park purposes.

We recommend that H. R. 8558 be not enacted.

Our studies of this proposal, as well as the advice we have received from the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, indicate that the site of the Battle of Pea Ridge and the events that took place there, although of much local interest, do not warrant inclusion of the area in the national park system. Historically, the Battle of Pea Ridge was not a decisive battle in the sense that Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Vicksburg, and Antietam were significant. These areas are already represented in the national park system. The Battle of Pea Ridge was one of the largest engagements of the Civil War fought west of the Mississippi River, but the results and significance of the battle were principally regional in character. Probably as much as any other single factor, the battle determined that the State of Missouri would remain Union rather than become Confederate. After the battle, there was no further fighting of any major character in the State for the next 2 years.

In the circumstances, we recognize that the battlefield is of much local interest and importance. The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments has expressed a wish to encourage the preservation of the battlefield, with the hope that the State or some local organization may be able to save it for public use. We concur in that suggestion, and would be pleased to cooperate with the State or any such organization desiring to develop a plan for local preservation of this historic area.

The Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the submission of this proposed report to the Congress.

Sincerely yours,

WESLEY A. D'EWART,  
*Assistant Secretary of the Interior.*

---

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,  
BUREAU OF THE BUDGET,  
Washington 25, May 8, 1956.

HON. CLAIR ENGLE,

*Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,  
House of Representatives, Washington 25, D. C.*

MY DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This is in response to your request for the views of this Bureau on H. R. 8558, to provide for the establishment of the Pea Ridge Battlefield National Park, in the State of Arkansas.

The Secretary of the Interior, in a report he is making to your committee, recommends against enactment of this bill. This Bureau agrees with the views set forth in that report.

Accordingly, you are advised that the Bureau of the Budget does not recommend enactment of H. R. 8558.

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT E. MERRIAM,  
*Assistant to the Director.*

The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs recommends enactment of H. R. 11611.

○